

Message Text

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16

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-25 SCI-06 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

SPC-03 SS-20 ACDA-19 NIC-01 SAJ-01 OMB-01 MC-02 DRC-01

NSF-04 IO-14 /148 W

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P R 010600Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2904

INFO USIA WASHDC

CINCPAC

UNCLAS CANBERRA 1914

E.O. 11652: N/A.

TAGS: PFOR, AS.

SUB: SYDNEY MORNING HERALD ITEM ON AUST/SOVIET SCIENTIFIC
BASE.

SUMMARY: RUSSIANS REQUEST GOVERNMENT TO ESTABLISH A JOINT
SCIENTIFIC BASE IN AUSTRALIA.

FOLLOWING IS FULL TEXT OF ITEM OF S.M.H. OF MON. APRIL 1
HEADED QUOTE RUSSIANS WANT TO SHARE BASE UNQTE - REQUEST TO
CANBERRA ALARMS THE U.S. (BY BRIAN JOHNS).

CANBERRA, SUNDAY. -

RUSSIA HAS SECRETLY ASKED THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO ESTAB-
LISH A JOINT SCIENTIFIC BASE IN AUSTRALIA.

THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT HAS REACTED WITH ALARM TO THE
RUSSIAN REQUEST.

IT BELIEVES SUCH A BASE WOULD THREATEN THE SECURITY OF
VITAL DEFENCE INFORMATION GATHERED BY AMERICAN BASES IN
AUSTRALIA. RUSSIA SURPRISED THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TWO WEEKS
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AGO WITH ITS REQUEST TO ESTABLISH A JOINT BASE FOR "SCI-

ENTIFIC PURPOSES".

THE BASE WOULD, IT IS BELIEVED, MONITOR SATELLITES
AND GATHER OTHER TECHNICAL INFORMATION.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INFORMED THE UNITED STATES OF THE
REQUEST AND THE U.S. AMBASSADOR TO AUSTRALIA, MR MARSHALL
GREEN, HAS ALREADY CONVEYED HIS GOVERNMENT'S DEEP CONCERN
ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING THE BASE.

THE RUSSIAN REQUEST COULD REOPEN THE WHOLE QUESTION OF
FOREIGN BASES IN AUSTRALIA. THIS HAS LONG BEEN AN EXTREMELY
SENSITIVE ISSUE IN THE ALP.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WAS UNPREPARED FOR THE REQUEST,
ALTHOUGH RUSSIA APPROACHED THE MCMAHON GOVERNMENT IN 1971
ABOUT ESTABLISHING A JOINT SCIENTIFIC BASE IN AUSTRALIA.
THE RENEWED REQUEST COMES AT A VERY DIFFICULT TIME FOR THE
PRIME MINISTER, MR. WHITLAM.

PROJECTED PACT. HE HAS THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL PROBLEM OF
FACING A CAMPAIGN FOR THE MAY 18 SENATE ELECTIONS, IN WHICH
THE RUSSIAN REQUEST COULD BE MADE A VERY EMBARRASSING ISSUE.
HE ALSO HAS THE DIPLOMATIC PROBLEM OF HIS SCHEDULED VISIT
TO RUSSIA IN MID-YEAR.
BOTH GOVERNMENTS HAVE BEEN DISCUSSING A SCIENTIFIC AGREEMENT
PLANNED TO BE SIGNED WHEN MR WHITLAM IS IN MOSCOW.
THE RUSSIAN REQUEST IS AN EARLY TEST OF AUSTRALIA'S
INTENTIONS ABOUT THE PACT.

IT IS ALSO AN EMBARRASSING TEST OF MR. WHITLAM'S FREQUENTLY
STATED POLICY OBJECTIVE OF ACHIEVING AN EVEN-HANDED APPROACH
IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

RUSSIA HAS BEEN SUSPICIOUS OF MR WHITLAM'S CONCERTED EFF-
ORTS TO NORMALISE AUSTRALIA'S RELATIONS WITH CHINA. ALLAYING
THESE SUSPICIONS IS ONE OF THE MAIN PURPOSES FOR WHIT-
LAM'S VISIT TO MOSCOW.

SECRET AREAS. THE UNITED STATES BELIEVES RUSSIA WOULD
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USE THE BASE TO MONITOR AMERICAN INSTALLATIONS IN
AUSTRALIA FOR SECRET DEFENCE INFORMATION, INCLUDING THE
NORTH-WEST CAPE BASE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA, AMBERLEY IN
QUEENSLAND, AND NURRUNGAR AND PINE GAP, NEAR ALICE SPRINGS.
MR. GREEN CONVEYED AMERICA'S FEARS TO THE SECRETARY OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT, MR ALAN RENOUF, IN CANBERRA
LAST TUESDAY.

HE IS UNDERSTOOD TO HAVE INDICATED THAT THIS GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE THE STRONGEST OBJECTION TO ANY RUSSIAN BASE BEING ESTABLISHED HERE.

MR. GREEN LISTED A NUMBER OF COUNTRIES WHERE, HE SAID, THE RUSSIANS HAD ESTABLISHED BASES ALLEGEDLY FOR SCIENTIFIC PURPOSES, BUT HAD IN FACT USED THEM TO GATHER STRATEGIC INFORMATION.

NEWS OF THE SOVIET'S POLITICALLY AND DIPLOMATICALLY EMBARRASSING REQUEST IS CERTAIN TO PROVOKE CONTROVERSY.

THE FEDERAL OPPOSITION IS BOUND TO TAKE UP THE ISSUE STRONGLY, PARTICULARLY IN THE LIGHT OF THE UNITED STATES FEARS. THE CONCERN ALREADY EXPRESSED TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT BY MR. GREEN MAKES IT PLAIN THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD REGARD THE PRESENCE OF A RUSSIAN BASE AS A THREAT TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AMERICAN BASES OPERATING HERE.

THERE WOULD BE NO GOOD TIME FOR THE SOVIET TO PRESS AUSTRALIA FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A JOINT BASE, BUT THE REQUEST CERTAINLY COULD NOT HAVE COME AT A WORSE TIME.

AFTER HEARING THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT'S FEARS FROM MR. GREEN MR. RENOUF IS BELIEVED TO HAVE ADVISED THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SENATOR WILLESEE, THAT HE COULD NOT DISAGREE WITH THE AMERICAN ESTIMATE OF SECURITY THREAT OF ANY RUSSIAN BASE IN AUSTRALIA.

A DECISION HAS NOT BEEN MADE ON THE RUSSIAN REQUEST, BUT THE AMERICAN PROTESTS ARE ALMOST CERTAIN TO CARRY DECISIVE WEIGHT WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND BRING ABOUT A REJECTION OF THE PROPOSED BASE.

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SOME AUSTRALIAN OFFICIALS ARE UNDERSTOOD TO BELIEVE THE REQUEST COULD BE STALLED BY SEEKING MORE DETAILS FROM RUSSIA ABOUT THE SCIENTIFIC PURPOSE OF THE BASE.
GREEN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION, INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION, PUBLIC ATTITUDES, MILITARY BASES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 APR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974CANBER01914
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740071-0435
From: CANBERRA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740478/aaaacttz.tel
Line Count: 159
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: shawdg
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 MAY 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <06 MAY 2002 by bryansd0>; APPROVED <12 DEC 2002 by shawdg>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SYDNEY MORNING HERALD ITEM ON AUST/SOVIET SCIENTIFIC BASE.
TAGS: PFOR, AS, US, UR
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005